

The Saint Chapter 12 - Tips

Carmen had been thrown up on twice before she made it to lunch. Not a great start to her shift at the Davenport clinic, but not as bad as it could have been, either. Plus, the anti-emetics and IV fluids she'd given both patients—a couple who would definitely think twice about trusting an All You Can Eat buffet for \$8.99 in the future, thanks, food poisoning—had made them feel much better, so it was worth it.

The fact that her busy morning had kept her from thinking about a certain detective with a piercing hazel stare and biceps she wanted to bite like an apple was just an added bonus.

“Estúpida,” Carmen muttered under her breath, shaking off the thought. Four days had passed since she'd left the Thirty-Third, and she hadn't heard from Liam or Isabella at all since then. Not that she'd expected to—her part in this case was done. Dante was as safe as he was going to get.

For all she knew, they'd already hooked up with this Cutter guy and were well on their way to picking up whoever had killed Axel. She needed to forget it and move the hell on.

Grabbing an electronic chart from the rack of them at the intake desk, Carmen tapped the screen to life. She turned to the patient board, ready to download the next patient's information and bring them back to take their vitals, but the sound of Harlow's four-inch heels clicking on the linoleum stopped her short.

“Hi, Carmen. Do you have a second?”

This woman was her boss. As friendly as Harlow was (and as prickly as Carmen could be when the occasion called for it), she wasn't about to pop off with a “no”. “Um, sure. Is everything okay?”

“Better than okay, actually. Royce Gannon is here to see you,” Harlow said with a smile.

Concealing her shock was an absolute no-go. “To see me? Are you sure?”

“Yep. He asked for you by name. Said he wanted to drop by in person to chat with you.”

Royce Gannon was on, like, half a dozen different hospital committees, not to mention being married to Remington Memorial's C-E-freaking-O. The guy was a serious heavyweight. This had to be some kind of mistake.

Unless he'd somehow found out about the night clinic.

Dread claimed Carmen's gut, sending her pulse into a tailspin. “I'm not in trouble or anything, am I?”

Harlow laughed even though Carmen had so not been joking. "I know these high-ups can make people nervous, but I'm sure you have nothing to worry about. He's in the conference room." She paused. "If you're that worried about it, though, I can go with you."

God, Harlow was far more intuitive than Carmen needed, and far nicer than she deserved. "Oh, no. That's okay. Like you said, I'm sure it's fine. Just unexpected."

"Okay. Petra and Malik can cover triage for a bit. If we get slammed, I'll pull Connor to help out. Take your time," Harlow said, smiling one last time before turning toward her office.

Carmen waited until the willowy blonde was all the way behind closed doors before forcing her feet toward the conference room. If Gannon had somehow discovered her involvement in the night clinic, she'd have to call Isabella. Yeah, she'd still lose her job, and probably her nursing license on top of it.

She wasn't exactly a saint. But maybe the Intelligence Unit could vouch for her enough that the hospital, or the board, or whoever, wouldn't press charges against her, or anyone else working at the place.

If we catch the guy who did this, it's going to be because you went above and beyond to get us what we needed.

On second thought, no. She might've helped on this case, but all the help on the planet wasn't going to be enough to redeem her.

Taking a deep breath that still didn't steady her, Carmen walked to the conference room, standing in front of the half-open door. The man sitting at the table looked like a cross between a millionaire and a movie star, both polished and handsome.

His suit had to have cost more than her car, the charcoal gray fabric draping his gym-fit body so flawlessly that there was no question it had been custom made. He smiled, revealing a set of pearly whites that she bet he told everyone were the real deal, and oh, God. This was going to be bad.

She held her chin up anyway. "Mr. Gannon? I'm Carmen Desoto. You wanted to see me?"

"Carmen, yes. Come in, come in." He waved her over the threshold. "It's so nice to finally meet you."

"Finally?" Carmen asked as he gestured her into the chair across from him, ironically the same one she'd sat in when Liam and Isabella had come to ask her those first questions about Axel.

"Of course. I've been reading up on you lately. You've got quite a reputation," Royce said.

Yeah, where she came from, that wasn't exactly a compliment. "I'm sorry, Mr. Gannon—"

"Please. Royce," he said, and okay, something was very, very weird here.

"Right. Royce. It's just that we're really busy today. Lots of patients, and all, so...how can I help you?"

He leaned back in his chair, crossing one ankle over his opposite knee as he gave her a good, long look. "Right to the point. I like that. The answer is that I'm putting together a bit of a special project and I was thinking you'd be perfect for the job."

He might as well have told her he wanted her to co-pilot him to the moon. "You're putting together a project and you want me to be part of it?"

"I do," he said. "It requires a certain background and set of skills that I feel confident you possess."

Just when she was sure this couldn't get any more Twilight Zone. "Okay. What does the project involve, exactly?"

"Let's call it an extension of your second job. You know, the one at the clinic over on Moreland Street?"

Carmen's breath froze in her lungs. "I'm not sure what you're talking about."

It was feeble, even to her ears, and Gannon took full advantage. "We're way past that, Carmen. I know you've been volunteering at an illegal clinic."

"Do you?" she asked on a last-ditch bluff.

Gannon didn't hesitate to call. "I think these tell the story well enough." Opening the folder on the table in front of him, he slid a trio of eight-by-ten photographs in her direction, making her gut sink like a stone. "But if not, then the testimony of the doctors and nurses who also volunteer there should suffice. Of course, in order to get it, the police would have to speak to all of them. There would be subpoenas, charges filed. The press would have a field day."

Carmen looked at the photos, all of which were of her on shift last night, and all of which had been taken from inside the night clinic. "You went to a lot of trouble to get these." Someone must have been posing as a patient, and that someone definitely hadn't been Gannon.

"Less than you'd think," he said smoothly. "I must admit, it's a noble cause. Or, it would be. If it were legal. But we both know that isn't the case."

"The people who come there need help," Carmen said, dropping all pretenses. "There are strict guidelines to keep everything—"

"You can spare me the song and dance," Gannon said with a condescending smile.

"Like I said, I've done my homework. Not only is that clinic unlicensed and illegal, it's a malpractice suit waiting to happen. Your association there puts the Davenport Clinic and Remington Memorial at risk of being sued."

"I've never told any of the patients that I work here, and I follow the orders of the licensed MDs at the night clinic, just like I do here," she protested, but he waved her off.

"Do you think any attorney worth his degree is going to care about that? As an employee, you represent our hospital, whether you're here or not. You signed a code of conduct when you were hired. Breaking the law is a blatant violation of that legally binding document. It's grounds for immediate termination. Among other things."

Carmen closed her eyes. She'd always known this could happen. Maybe she'd been stupid to think she could dodge it in the first place. "I understand. I'll clean out my locker."

Gannon shook his head. "You'll do no such thing."

"I'm...sorry?" Was he serious? "I don't understand."

"As I said, I have a project in mind for you. A reconnaissance mission, if you will. You see, you have access to some things that are of potential value to me."

"What on earth do I have access to that you don't?" Carmen asked, totally confused. For Chrissake, this guy had more status in his baby toe than she had in every last part of her put together.

"As an employee of this clinic?" He looked around the room pointedly. "Lots of things. If you help me with a few small tasks, I might be willing to forget what I know about your volunteer job."

The words sank in, one by one, until... "Wait. Are you blackmailing me?"

"I prefer to call it an agreement."

Carmen snorted, her attitude rising to the occasion like the defense mechanism it was. "Whatever helps you sleep at night."

Gannon snapped to attention, trading his smile for a menacing stare. "I don't think you understand the seriousness of this matter. You aren't just going to lose your job and your license if I take this to the authorities. Every single person who has ever worked at that underground clinic will, too. Not to mention the fact that the place will be boarded up without notice. Criminal charges will be levied. I'll make sure of that."

Oh, God. He wasn't bluffing. "You can't do that."

"I can, and I will, unless you cooperate. I'm giving you an easy out here, Carmen. You help me, and I'll protect your secret."

She couldn't let all those people lose their licenses and go to jail. But she couldn't help this arrogant as*s clown with whatever he was trying to pull, either. Think, think. Come on, girl. Think! "Let's say I'm willing to help you. Hypothetically," she said, hoping like hell he'd take her interest at face value and not recognize it for the fishing expedition that it was. "What exactly would you want me to do?"

Gannon smiled like a man very used to getting his way. Prick. "I'm interested in obtaining information from this clinic's database. Hypothetically."

"Information," she repeated, but Gannon shook his head.

"I'm not inclined to share more than that."

Damn it, Carmen needed to keep him talking. Self-importance radiated off of him like a stink—the haughty lift of his chin practically screamed "I'm better than you"—so she took a swipe at his ego. "Oh, so you're not in charge, then?"

His chin jerked even higher, and bullseye. "Excuse me?"

"It's cool. I get it. You can't tell me because you don't know."

"Don't think I don't know what you're trying to do," he said, and what the hell. She had nothing else to lose.

"And don't think I'm going to agree to do whatever you ask me to without knowing the details. I may be a criminal, but I'm not stupid. Anyway, you'll have to tell me sooner or later if you want me to do the job right. It might as well be now."

She punctuated the claim with her very hardest stare, holding onto it until Gannon finally said, "I'm interested in accessing certain portions of patient records."

Oh, no. Hell, no. "I'm not letting you rip off the patients," Carmen said.

But Gannon just laughed. "That's not nearly as lucrative as what I have planned."

One heartbeat. Two. Then... “You’re going to scam the insurance companies.” Jesus, this guy had balls the size of Jupiter.

Gannon didn’t confirm anything, but then again, he didn’t have to. “All you need to do is focus on getting my associate access to the accounts. We’ll take care of the rest.”

“How kind of you,” Carmen said.

“Don’t be so ungrateful,” Gannon said, his tone all steel. “You’ll be paid for your efforts.”

Great. So, if she got caught, it would look like she’d been in on things rather than coerced. Speaking of which... “How do I know you won’t just tell Connor and Harlow, or the police, about the night clinic after I help you?”

“You don’t.”

“You’re not really making a case for yourself, just so you know,” Carmen grumbled.

But Gannon simply shrugged. “I don’t have to. I’m quite sure I’m holding all the cards here. But, if it helps reassure you, I’m not interested in having you arrested unless I have to. Investigations can be so messy.”

Of course. She was more valuable to him if she could provide access to the clinic database, then quietly disappear. It was the perfect scam.

Something poked at her subconscious, trying to form a full warning, but she couldn’t quite grasp it. “So, what do you want from me, specifically?”

“If you agree to participate, I’ll be in touch with instructions. If not”—he lifted a shoulder halfway before letting it casually drop back into place—“best of luck in prison.”

Carmen rolled through her options. She couldn’t exactly go to Connor and Harlow, or anyone else at the hospital, without exposing the night clinic. Plus, Gannon was married to Remington Memorial’s CEO, and it was Carmen’s word against his that this conversation had even happened. No one would ever believe her over him. She certainly couldn’t give this cretin access to the clinic files, but she also couldn’t tell him no. Which left her only one choice.

She had to trust Liam to help her, the way he’d trusted her to get Dante to talk.

“Fine,” she lied. “I’ll do it.”

“I knew you’d see things my way,” Gannon said, his condescending smile firmly back in place as he stood. “Glad we have a deal.”

He extended his hand, and Carmen's heart crashed into her sternum at the sight of the gold and platinum Cartier watch, complete with Roman numerals on the pearly white watch face, peeking out from beneath his sleeve.